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SUBJECT: CHALABI AIDE SAYS INCOMPETENCE, LACK OF BUDGET
HINDER POPULAR COMMITTEES EFFORT

REF: BAGHDAD 680

Classified By: PRT Team Leader Joseph Gregoire for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: Ahmad Chalabi aide Wameed Al-Mekhlibi told PRToffs March 17 that lack of coordination with security forces, incompetent ministries, and Prime Minister Maliki's failure to provide a budget have hindered efforts to form effective popular committees. Al-Mekhlibi said there is little coordination with security forces or the provincial government and that the most effective popular committee is in Sadr City. Chalabi's latest efforts focus on dealing with detainee inquiries and trying to improve coordination with service ministries and security forces. End Summary.

Lack of Budget Forces Chalabi to Cough Up Funds

¶2. (C) Ahmad Chalabi aide Wameed Al-Mekhlibi met with PRToffs March 17 to discuss the popular mobilization strand of the Baghdad Security Plan (BSP). Al-Mekhlibi said the prime minister's refusal to provide a budget for the initiative has severely hindered progress and forced Chalabi to use his own money to pay for popular committee expenses such as meeting space and communications. Al-Mekhlibi said Chalabi is using 20 employees from his de-Baathification staff to support activities of the popular committees.

¶3. (C) Al-Mekhlibi said Chalabi will continue to fund the popular committees effort with his own money if he does not receive a budget from the prime minister, but noted that failure to receive funds would severely restrict the initiative. (Note: Al-Mekhlibi told us in previous meetings that Chalabi had requested a \$65 million budget from the Prime Minister for the popular committees initiative but was denied any funding. End Note.)

¶4. (C) Al-Mekhlibi had little information on popular committee initiative's executive steering committee (ESC). He said the members he knew on the ESC were Chalabi, Nasir Al-Ani (a Tawafiq member who is supposed to be the joint leader of the initiative), Amer Jaburi (Tawafiq), and Ali Faisal (a Sadrist who is also the executive director of the De-Baathification commission). Al-Mekhlibi said there are other members but he did not know who they were, which suggests the popular committees ESC is not particularly active.

¶5. (C) Al-Mekhlibi said he did not know the 10 liaison officers Chalabi appointed to head each sector's popular committee (reftel). He said he would try to get the names of the popular committee ESC members and the 10 liaison officers later this week. Al-Mekhlibi said the liaison officers meet about once per week in Chalabi's Mansour home.

Stupid Committee Members and Incompetent Ministries

¶6. (C) Al-Mekhlibie said that Chalabi and his associates have had a difficult time recruiting capable members for the popular committees because they cannot offer salaries and many people are unwilling to risk being branded as government collaborators. He added that many of those they have been able to recruit are &stupid and incompetent.⁸ He added that there are only about 100 members for each of the 10 sectors, committee as present, although they had hoped to recruit at least 1,000 per committee.

¶7. (C) Al-Mekhlibie said that the prime minister asked Chalabi to work with the Ministry of Trade to ensure the delivery of public distribution system food rations. He said the ministry,s failure to deliver rations to unsafe areas prompted the Prime Minister Maliki to ask Chalabi to use the popular committees to ensure safe and efficient delivery.

¶8. (C) Al-Mekhlibie said Chalabi has hired 25 lawyers to help with various detainee issues such as locating detainees, ensuring that they are being held legally, and arranging timely trials. He said that the 25 lawyers have not yet been paid, but that Chalabi will use his own funds to pay them even if he receives no budget from the prime minister. Al-Mekhlibie said the lawyers are meeting daily and are looking into about 100 detainee cases, including some detainees who were arrested before BSP started.

¶9. (C) When asked if the lawyers are coordinating their efforts with the Ministry of Human Rights, Al-Mekhlibie characterized the ministry as ineffective and powerless to solve detainee problems.

Little Coordination with Security Forces, Local Government

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¶10. (C) Al-Mekhlibie said Chalabi has met recently with General Abboud Ganbar and &other Iraqi Army generals⁸ (whom he could not name) to discuss popular committee activities, but added that coordination has been limited because security forces are &afraid to cooperate with Chalabi.⁸ He said Iraqi army and police representatives will be invited to the popular committee headquarters at Chalabi,s home in Mansour to facilitate future cooperation.

¶11. (C) When asked if the popular committees are working with the Provincial Council (PC) or District Advisory Councils (DACs), Al-Mekhlibie said the PC has called Chalabi,s initiative illegal and refused to cooperate. Al-Mekhlibie added that the prime minister had not provided Chalabi any official documentation authorizing his initiative, which he said has made some government entities reluctant to cooperate. He said that some DAC members serve on popular committees, but otherwise there is no cooperation with local government.

¶12. (C) Al-Mekhlibie said the prime minister has given Chalabi \$1 million to disperse to &victims of violence⁸ in Baghdad. Al-Mekhlibie said he did not know how the victims would be chosen, how many there would be, how their claims would be vetted or how much money various victims would receive. He said Chalabi,s staff would eventually meet with victims or surviving family members and collect supporting documentation such as death certificates and police reports to determine the veracity of claims.

Sadr City is the Most Cooperative Sector

¶13. (C) Al-Mekhlibie said the popular committee in Sadr City is functioning better than committees in any other sector. When asked why he thought this was so, Al-Mekhlibie replied that many senior Sadrists have fled abroad, leaving behind only junior leaders who are anxious to avoid confrontation

with U.S. and Iraqi forces.

Four Sunni Mosques Reopened

¶14. (C) Al-Mekhlibi said Chalabi has worked with community leaders to re-open four Sunni mosques, two of which are located in Sadr City. He did not know where the other two mosques are located. Al-Mekhlibi said Chalabi is not working with the Sunni or Shia Awqaf (religious endowments) or senior religious leaders such as Ayatollah Hussein Al-Sadr or Abdul-Ghafoor Samarrai.

Comment

¶15. (C) Chalabi's popular mobilization efforts appear to be disorganized and carried out with little or no cooperation with other Iraqi stakeholders. Chalabi appears to have drifted away from using the popular committees as part of a private intelligence collection effort, which is a welcome development. However, all of the new activities he is focusing on are duplicating efforts of Iraqi ministries or provincial government bodies. End comment.

KHALILZAD